

The Hudson Institute has found an admirable way to combat two damaging, and ~~often~~ ^{often} undeserved, public impressions about independent, non-profit defense research contractors: that they are monolithic, and that they are stooges for, or at least constrained to be uncritical of, a Service or Administration policy line. The solution is to bind together disparate views of individual staff members and exhibit them to the public in the process of ^{arguing} ~~disagreeing~~ ^{in many cases} sharply with each other and with official US Government positions.

This dialectic approach is, especially ~~useful~~ ^{useful} moreover, substantively rewarding when the subject-matter is so complex and controversial as that of Vietnam policy.

No one ~~editor~~ ^{editor} writer, even if he tries, is

likely to ~~also~~ ^{further} give attention to many of the different relevant points of view and paths of approach to these problems, and each of the fine writers represented here adds significantly to the discussion, as does the direct confrontation in a ~~symposium~~ ^{roundtable} ~~debate~~ ^{symposium debate} concluding the book. In fact, the ~~effect of~~ ^{the book's} adversarial format of the book seems so effective a framework for ~~bringing~~ ^{bringing} explicating major issues underlying policy questions that one wishes its potential had been exploited somewhat more. ~~Chapter presenting~~ The papers by Frank Ambuster and Raymond Bastil, on the one hand, presenting the case for pressing on toward post Administration objectives in Vietnam via a considerably modified military/public strategy, and the opposing papers by Edmund Stillman and

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William Pfaff, arguing for cutting losses, rarely
must lead on. Instead of ^{the} ~~a~~ comparison of
evidence and ^{cross-}examination of opposing hypotheses that
the book's ~~structure~~ ^{structure} ~~for~~ ~~most~~ ~~persons~~ ~~seems~~
to promise, one finds that quite different factors and
issues are raised in each essay, and the ~~off~~
various assertions slip past each other with
only occasional challenges. To a considerable
extent this is compensated by Herman Kahn's
three chapters, in which he goes beyond the
written contributions of the other authors to
summarize and compare their points of view and
differences. ~~In his opening paper, Kahn provides~~
~~the~~ Although Kahn confesses that the
members of the Institute had failed, ^{adequately} to achieve his
goal of ^{adequate} "second-order agreement" (as to
what the disagreements on policy were about),

they have approached a useful substitute, for the reader; in fact, I found the Stillman-Pfaff position ~~about~~ as clearly-expressed and, ^(relatively) compelling in Kahn's characterization of it as in their own papers.

¶ The discipline of comparing and ~~and~~ analyzing ~~opposing~~ ^{responsibly} opposing viewpoints ~~adds~~ among his Institute colleagues is obviously rewarding for Kahn's ~~own~~ own presentation, which throughout the book is sober, judicious, and lacking in flamboyance. (~~Here~~ His concluding sentence — apparently written after the Tet offensive, while the book was conceived and mostly written before it — is ~~absolutely~~ ^{even} ~~unwontedly~~ diffident: "It seems to me that despite the general feeling today that everything has been tried and nothing works, I and that we are in a morass, we can in fact responsibly — with good faith and good heart — dedicate ourselves at the least

to a intelligent temporary action, and possibly to
victory itself." As a ^{final} response to the clarion
question of the title, "Can we win in Vietnam?",
the news to sound rather an uncertain trumpet.)

Three of the authors — Kahn, Ambrose and
Hastil — are described as in "limited but reasonably
broad agreement with many of the policies and
objections of the Johnson Administration" (though
Hastil's interesting discussion of Vietnamese realities
leads him to such conditional and pessimistic
conclusions that it is not clear ~~historically~~ how
far he should really be linked to the other
"war-winners.") ~~the proposals~~ ^{all} ~~proposed~~ ~~with~~ ~~substantive~~ ~~even~~
~~all~~ ~~particular~~ ~~a~~ ~~useful~~ ~~direction~~ Nevertheless,
the ~~intelligent~~ ~~fringe~~ take ^{strong} ~~direct~~ exception to
many Administration positions and policies (including
the "attrition" theory and practice, indiscriminate
use of firepower, ^{(escalation as it was pursued,} ~~the~~ ~~then-current~~ ~~bombing~~ ~~campaign~~
~~in Tonkin)~~ ~~and even — most heretically — the doctrine~~
~~that the North Vietnamese had committed "aggression,"~~
~~and~~ ~~passive~~ ~~recommendations,~~ which, though familiar

identified
in policy debate (isolate a number of various
experts on counterinsurgency have proposed ~~that~~ or
then before ^{in Vietnam} and would, I believe, still endorse
them), ^{many} ~~they~~ would represent radical changes in current
US strategy, deployment and approach.

But ~~the way~~ These measures would, I believe,
be to the good. But the very fact that they have
never been ~~been~~ implemented properly, or at all,
is by now a historical datum whose ^{true} significance
~~that~~ ~~and his~~ ~~two~~ ~~colleagues~~ ~~there~~ these three writers
^{manage} ~~seem~~ to ignore. To see its bearing mainly as they
do — as positive token that "there is large room for
improvement" in US-GVN program and performance (p. 308) —
seems about perverse.

there is "large room for improvement" in both U.S. and GVN efforts
 The assertion cited
 is most certainly, poignantly true today. But it was ^{equally} just as true in
 1958, and 1961, and 1965. And the "possibilities" for improvement
 looked just as "great" in those years. What makes these perceptions
 appear clearly inadequate today as a basis for either prediction or
 policy -- just as, we can see now, they were inadequate then -- is pre-
 cisely the fact that the room for improvement is just as large, and in
 just the same places, today as it was ten years ago, with nearly all
 the prospective "possibilities" remaining just that.

Yet most, or all, of the proposals ^{advanced by Acheson and Kahn} in this book, among others, were
 made to GVN and U.S. authorities during that period, by such articulate,
 expert, and well-placed spokesmen as Robert Thompson, F. P. Serong, and
 later, John Vann. To be sure, few of these notions were ever imple-
 mented properly, or at all. But by now, that historical datum has great
 significance, and to see its beaming ^{mainly} as Kahn and his two colleagues do --
 mainly as a positive token of ^{the} continued "possibility" of improvement --
 is ^{simply} ~~merely~~ perverse.

To understand why we have not done better in Vietnam, and to appraise
 the prospects ^{and likelihood of} for doing better in the future, it is by this time far
 from enough to say, ^{There} "Here are promising measures, ^{some of which worked well in other hands elsewhere;} that have never been
 fairly tried ^{by the US in Vietnam.}" One must ask, and attempt to answer, just why they were
 never tried; ^{and} what reason there is, now, to believe they are more
 likely to get a fair trial in the future; ^{and} ^{how likely} if they do, how likely it is
 they will be as effective ^{against the enemy, in this country and time.}
 In short, if the title question is to be a useful starting-point, ^{the year} ^(in 1968)
 the word ^{"Vietnam"} ~~"the"~~ must be taken quite seriously; likewise, the word
~~"Vietnam"~~ ^{"we."}